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DID **JESUS** **SIN** WHEN HE **TOUCHED** THE **LEPER?**

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Did Jesus Sin When He Touched the Leper?

Dave Miller, Ph.D.

ON one occasion, Jesus encountered a leper who sought His cleansing. Here are the three accounts of this incident by the Gospel writers:

When He had come down from the mountain, great multitudes followed Him. And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed (Matthew 8:1-3).

Then a leper came to Him, imploring Him, kneeling down to Him and saying to Him, “If You are willing, You can make me clean.” And Jesus, moved with compassion, put out His hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.” As soon as He had spoken, immediately the leprosy left him, and he was cleansed (Mark 1:40-42).

And it happened when He was in a certain city, that behold, a man who was full of leprosy saw Jesus; and he fell on his face and implored Him, saying, “Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean.” Then He put out His hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately the leprosy left him (Luke 5:12-13).

Atheists might very well insist that since Jesus “violated” God’s law by touching a leper, He sinned and therefore cannot be divine. Others—within Christendom—give credence to this allegation by claiming that this incident illustrates Jesus’ willingness to set aside the “letter of the law” while retaining the “spirit of the law.” In other words, they maintain that Jesus technically violated Mosaic law by touching the leper, but that this legal infraction was excused, superseded, or justified on the basis of the compassion that the violation enabled Jesus to confer to the diseased man. Several observations are in order pertaining to this viewpoint.

Obedience Always Necessitated

In the first place, the Bible consistently and repeatedly stresses the fact that humans are under divine obligation to obey God’s laws—always and without exception. Psalm 119 constitutes a breath-taking declaration that God’s laws are the **only** means by which a person can live life effectively. Regarding the living of life, Solomon concluded that the “whole” of man is to fear God and keep His commandments. Jesus insisted that if we love Him, we will keep His commandments. Indeed, John stated emphatically: “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and car-

rying out his commands. For **this** is love for God: to keep His commands. And His commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:3). Since “it is not in man who walks to direct his own steps” (Jeremiah 10:23), it is absolutely essential and mandatory that humans obey God’s laws and not seek any so-called “exceptions” by which one may excuse oneself from strict, loving obedience. After all, Jesus is “the author of eternal salvation **to all who obey Him**” (Hebrews 5:9). The Bible is literally saturated with admonitions to obey God’s laws—with no hint that His laws may be set aside under certain conditions—as suggested by the next observation.

Spirit vs. Letter of the Law?

In the second place, the Bible makes no such distinction as the “letter of the law” versus the “spirit of the law” as envisioned by those who assert it. Though this notion has gained traction in recent years, it is a complete misuse and misrepresentation of Paul’s instructions to the Corinthian Christians found in 2 Corinthians 3 as well as Paul’s remark to the church in Romans 6:6. An instance of its promotion may be seen in the podcast “Exploring Faith pursuing Grace”:

Jesus broke the law as far as the exact wording and as far as the specific letter of the law was concerned, but He did not actually break the law because the law, the purpose, the intent of the law was not put in place so that this man could not be healed. The purpose or the intent of the law was put in place to protect other people. And so Jesus, **while technically violating the letter of the law** was not actually violating the intent or the purpose of the law.... We have to understand that the spirit of the law allows for exceptions and qualifiers that are not actually stated in the letter of the law.¹

This approach to Scripture imposes a humanly-devised hermeneutical grid on the biblical text. It is certainly true that every single law that has ever ushered forth from the mind of God has deliberate divine intention. The biblical truth on the matter is that the so-called spirit, purpose, or intent of the law is **inherently contained within the letter of the law and cannot be separated from it.**² The intent of law is embodied in the law itself. Those who press this concocted, anti-biblical bifurcation are, though perhaps unwittingly, encouraging people to sidestep laws of God in order to advance a self-centered agenda. All of God's laws are perfect and do not require human tinkering in order to determine whether they may be set aside in order to accommodate the alleged intent of those laws.³ Indeed, the **only** way for humans to manifest the love that God requires to be manifested toward others is to **obey His laws**. Paul said as much when he declared that "love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10). He meant that the only way to love your neighbor is to obey God's laws which, in turn, constitute the sole expression of love. Performing God's laws is **the way** to express love. In God's sight, it is impossible to express true love while disobeying His commands. Disobedience is unloving, while obedience is loving. The **only** way to love others is to obey the law.

Legalism?

In the third place, closely associated with the artificial "spirit vs. letter" concept, it is commonplace in religious circles to insist that a sizable percentage of the church is afflicted with the malady of "legalism." Those who maintain a biblical emphasis on obedience to God's laws are frequently decried as "legalistic" in their approach to the Bible: "When we approach the

Scriptures from a **legalistic** framework in which we elevate the letter of the law above the intent of the law..., then we're really not being Christlike at all."⁴

Listening carefully to the majority of those who fling about the term "legalistic," it is soon apparent that they understand the term to refer to **too much attention to legal detail**. While the term "legalism" is not used in the Bible, its use can certainly express a biblical idea: **trusting one's own goodness**. Legalism pertains to one's **attitude** about one's own person (i.e., having an inflated sense of self-importance—Luke 18:11-12; Proverbs 25:27; Romans 12:3) and practice (i.e., thinking he or she can **earn or merit** salvation on the basis of performance—Luke 17:10; Romans 3:9-18,23; 11:35; 1 Corinthians 9:16). Of course, the classic "legalists" of Jesus' day were the Pharisees and, ironically, they were guilty of the very accusation that some make today when they speak derisively of those who stress obedience by labeling them "legalistic."⁵ No wonder Jesus stated emphatically: "Whoever therefore breaks one of the **least** of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:19-20). He meant that careful attention to **all** of God's commandments—including those deemed "least"—demonstrates a conscientious regard for pleasing God. Indeed, seeking to obey God with an humble attitude and a loving heart is paramount (cf. Matthew 23:23).⁶

Jesus Never Sinned

Fourth, the very definition of sin is violation of God's law (1 John 3:4). The fact is that Jesus **never** violated

any law of God—"technical" or otherwise (Hebrews 4:15). Nor did He ever exempt Himself from the laws of God. He set the perfect example of **complete** obedience (Hebrews 5:9). He perfectly conformed to the life-giving laws of deity (which He, Himself, authored!). He never—even for an instant—encouraged anyone to stray from rigid obedience to the laws of God. He enjoined both "weightier" and less weightier matters of the law as equally essential (Matthew 23:23). No one is ever justified in breaking God's laws—since **all** of God's laws were designed and intended by God **to bring life** (Romans 7:10).⁷ Indeed, "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12). By them we will be judged (John 12:48). Those who view law as somehow negative, undesirable, or oppressive betray an antinomian spirit that is completely contrary to the very nature of God. The interpretation of the account of the leper that maintains that Jesus violated the law pertaining to the touching of lepers is in direct contradiction to the life that Jesus lived on Earth.

Mosaic "Uncleanness" Was Not Sinful

In the fifth place, the book of Leviticus has as its central theme: "You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45). Forms of the word "holy" are used well over 100 times in the book. The Hebrew verb means to be set apart, consecrate, dedicate, devote, hallow, sanctify, make inviolable.⁸ God desired that this concept of **separateness** be instilled—even ingrained—into the Israelite consciousness. He regularly emphasized to them that they were to be distinct and separate in their conduct from the rest of the nations that surrounded them. They were set apart for service to God and they were to understand very keenly that they were to be devoted to His

laws—the very means by which they could remain holy. Peter used this very passage from Leviticus to emphasize the necessity of Christian obedience:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as **obedient children**, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy” (1 Peter 1:13-16).

Hence, there are many injunctions in the Law of Moses in which God prescribed procedures to be enacted under certain circumstances that are purely symbolical and instructive in their import—intended to continually remind the Israelites of the distinct and separate lives they were living. Some related to illness and disease, with some of God’s injunctions also serving as medical assistance. Yet other measures addressed everyday features of human life that were not sinful, but which were to be dealt with in such a way that the central message of holiness was reinforced.

One example of this latter category of Levitical instructions pertained to bodily discharges and emissions. God used these natural occurrences as another opportunity to emphasize **separateness**. For instance, bodily fluids associated with a married couple’s sexual intercourse were to be treated as a state of uncleanness in which the couple were to wash themselves as well as the clothing and bed sheets that might have been affected. They would be considered unclean until that evening (Leviticus 15:16-18). Was their sexual union sinful in God’s sight? Of course not—He ordained the sexual relationship. Another example pertains to the normal, God-designed monthly dis-

charge of menstrual blood among women. Similar cleansing procedures were to be enacted and periods of uncleanness to be observed (Leviticus 15:19-24). Notice that **these circumstances had nothing to do with sinful activity**. Being placed in a state of **uncleanness** did not make the individual guilty of sin. Being “unclean” was not to be equated with being “sinful.”⁹

Another example of non-sinful Mosaic uncleanness relates to dead bodies. Everyone who lives for any length of time will experience the deaths of family members and friends. They will very likely come into physical contact with a dead body—either at the very moment of death (if they are present when death occurs), or when they visit the funeral home or attend the funeral. It would be virtually impossible for all Israelites to avoid coming into physical contact with a deceased person (cf. Joshua 8:29; 1 Kings 13:29-30; Mark 6:29). And to do so would not have been sinful!¹⁰ Sin came into play **if one failed to implement cleansing procedures**. Interestingly, in this regard, an occasion arose in Israel in which “there were certain men who were defiled by a human corpse, so that they could not keep the Passover on that day” (Numbers 9:6). Moses inquired of the Lord and received these divine instructions: “If anyone of you or your posterity is unclean because of a corpse, or is far away on a journey, he may still keep the LORD’s Passover. On the fourteenth day of the second month, at twilight, they may keep it” (Numbers 9:10-11). In other words, they could observe the Passover one month later. While their uncleanness exempted them from observing the Passover at the stipulated time, they were not guilty of sin either for their uncleanness or their inability to observe the Passover at that time. Observe further that God did not

approach the matter with the faulty “spirit vs. letter of the law.” Rather, He built into the law additional laws that could be applied to unusual happenstances.

What are we to conclude from these Mosaic injunctions? Under most circumstances, **it was not sinful for a person to enter into a state of uncleanness**—accidental or otherwise. Sin would ensue only after-the-fact if the person failed to enact the cleansing procedures stipulated by the law. In the case of Jesus touching the leper, He would not have been guilty of sin merely for touching the man. He would have been required by the law after-the-fact to enact the specified cleansing activity and timeframe (Leviticus 22:6-7)—which He, no doubt, did if it was necessary for Him to do so. The inspired writer did not choose to inform us of these subsequent potentialities. Hence, it is incorrect to conclude that (1) Jesus violated the law (“letter” or otherwise) by merely touching the man, and (2) He did not engage in the appropriate after-the-fact cleansing procedure stipulated by Mosaic law. In fact, on this very occasion, Jesus demonstrated His high regard for and commitment to the Law when He “strictly warned him” to show himself to the priest and to offer “those things which Moses commanded, as a testimony to them” (Mark 1:43-44; Cf. Luke 5:14; 17:14). If Jesus was so strict about adherence to the law in the case of the leper, it stands to reason He would have been strict about it in His own case as well. If cleansing was legally necessary, He most certainly would have sought cleansing.

The Priesthood of Jesus

Finally, apart from these five observations, the fact of the matter is that the Law of Moses was equally explicit regarding how lepers were to be handled in Israelite society

as it related to the matter of clean/unclean, as reported in Leviticus 14. The cleansing procedures involved the use of two male lambs without blemish, one ewe lamb of the first year without blemish, three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil as a grain offering, and one log of oil (Leviticus 14:10). Various actions were to be performed using these items, which included **the actual touching of the leper:**

The priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering, and the priest shall **put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot.** And the priest shall take some of the log of oil, and pour it into the palm of his own left hand. Then the priest shall **dip his right finger in the oil** that is in his left hand, and shall sprinkle some of the oil with his finger seven times before the LORD. And of the rest of the oil in his hand, the priest shall **put some on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot,** on the blood of the trespass offering (Leviticus 14:14-17).

For those who were unable to afford all the items to be used in the cleansing ritual, less expensive items were incorporated into the ceremony but, once again, the priest touching the diseased individual was included:

Then he shall kill the lamb of the trespass offering, and the priest shall take some of the blood of the trespass offering and **put it on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of his right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot....** And the priest shall put some of the oil that is in his hand **on the tip of the right ear of him who is to be cleansed, on the thumb of the right hand, and on the big toe of his right foot,** on the place of the blood of

the trespass offering (Leviticus 14:25,28).

Observe carefully that, even though the rank-and-file Israelite would have been made unclean if he touched a leprous person, that law **did not apply to the priests.**¹¹ It's not that priests were **exceptions** to the rule, or that they were violating the so-called "letter of the law"; rather, they were simply not envisioned as included in the restriction—in the same way that males are not included in the legal admonitions directed to females (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:12), and single Christians are not required to be married as are elders and deacons (1 Timothy 3:2,12). Though Jesus' priesthood was not according to the Law of Moses, having descended from the tribe of Judah (Hebrews 7:14), nevertheless, He was a priest—after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 5:1-11)—and fully qualified to enact Mosaic legislation. It follows, then, that Jesus did not violate the Mosaic restriction concerning the touching of a leprous person for the simple reason that that particular law was not addressed to Him. That is, as is the case with the purpose of miracles throughout Bible history, He was **confirming** (Mark 16:20) His oral claim to be God by performing a miraculous sign authenticating that claim.¹² In so doing, He also foreshadowed the magnificent fact that He was/is a **priest**, in fact, our **high priest** (Hebrews 2:17; 3:1; 7:26; 8:1; et al.). And while it was not necessary for Jesus to physically touch the leper to cleanse Him, as the ultimate, quintessential priest, He had **legal right** as a priest to touch the leper in order to convey cleansing to him.

Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympa-

thize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:14-16).

SUMMARY

JESUS' touching of a leper is not an instance of Him breaking "the letter of the law." In doing so, He did not contradict His consistent insistence that all people are under divine obligation to conform themselves to God's directives. When He admonished all of us, "If you love Me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15), He was simply reiterating His own attitude and conduct toward His Father's will: "I always do those things that please Him" (John 8:29). The sinless Son of God remains the perfect example of how to live life on Earth.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Kevin Pendergrass and Dr. Lee Grant (2020), "E3: Spirit of the Law vs. Letter of the Law," May 14, <https://efpg.podbean.com/e/e3-spirit-of-the-law-vs-letter-of-the-law/>, emp. added.
- ² See Dave Miller (2002), "The Spirit and Letter of the Law," <https://apologeticspress.org/the-spirit-and-letter-of-the-law-1225/>; Dave Miller (1996), *Piloting the Strait* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications), pp. 410-415.
- ³ The "Father of Situation Ethics," Joseph Fletcher, released his book *Situation Ethics* in the 1930s and, in so doing, launched a trend that has had an enormous negative impact on American civilization. He maintained that we should follow the rules until we need to break them for reasons of love. Of course, all of God's laws are based on *agape* love (Christian unconditional love), and though we should always do the most loving thing in any situation, God must tell us what that loving thing is. For a discussion of situational thinking, with specific treatment of the grainfield incident in Matthew 12, the adulterous woman in John 8, et al., see Dave Miller (2004), "Situation Ethics—Extended Version," <https://apologeticspress.org/situation-ethicextended-version-645/>.

(cont. on p. 140)

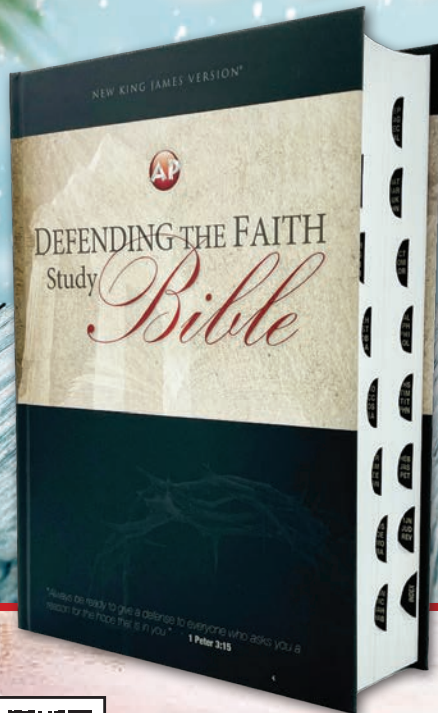
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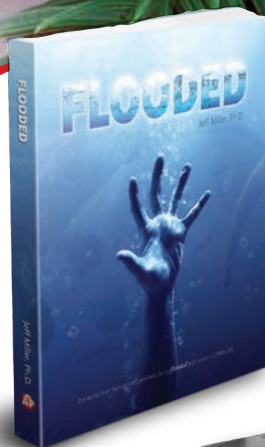
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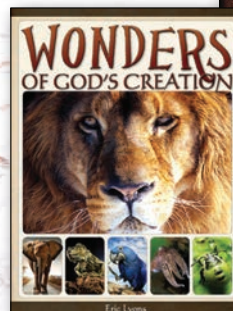
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- ⁴ Pendergrass and Grant, emp. added.
- ⁵ While the Pharisees were vocal about their commitment to obeying God, their actions showed that they were paying lip service to faithful, loving obedience. The progressive element within Christendom does the same thing. While stressing love and grace, they introduce illicit, man-made innovation into worship without God's approval, all the while justifying themselves like the Pharisees.
- ⁶ For a more extensive analysis of "legalism" in the church, see Dave Miller (2002), "Legalism," <https://apologeticspress.org/legalism-1211/>.
- ⁷ God articulated an eternal principle when He stated: "You shall observe My judgments and keep My ordinances, to walk in them: I am the LORD your God. You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, **he shall live by them**: I am the LORD" (Leviticus 18:4-5; cf. Nehemiah 9:29; Ezekiel 20:11,13,21; Galatians 3:12). In other words, obedience to God's laws enables the obedient to survive, be alive spiritually, and remain in God's favor.
- ⁸ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles Briggs (2004 reprint), *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Hendrickson), p. 873; L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, M.E.J. Richardson, & J.J. Stamm (1994-2000), *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, electronic ed.), p. 1074.
- ⁹ The only way their unclean status could involve them in sin is if they appeared before the Tabernacle in that state of uncleanness (Leviticus 15:31), or disobeyed God's instructions concerning cleansing.
- ¹⁰ An exception to this fact under Mosaic law was the one who had taken the Nazirite vow: "All the days that he separates himself to the LORD he shall not go near a dead body. He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head. All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD" (Numbers 6:6-8). Observe that, though the Nazirite was forbidden to contact a dead body under any circumstance, the average Israelite was under no such restriction. After all, someone has to bury the dead! Even this seemingly severe regulation for the Nazirite—which was strictly voluntary—was intended to accentuate the critical importance of being holy before God and exalting His breathtaking, infinite holiness. Cf. B.F. Westcott (1892), *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Macmillan), p. 346.

¹¹ One might argue that the reason the priests could touch a leper is because the leper had already overcome his leprosy and thus the priests were not technically touching "lepers." However, since the priest's involvement was for the purpose of pronouncing the leper "clean," and the rituals that the priest applied to the leper are specifically said to be **the means of cleansing** that preceded the declaration of "clean," then he was still considered "unclean" until the stipulated rituals were completed. So even if the leper was actually already relieved of the disease, he was still considered unclean until the cleansing rituals were performed. For someone to touch him during this period would still make that person unclean. So, for example, Leviticus 14:18-20 states: "The rest of the oil in his palm the priest shall put on the head of the one **to be cleansed**

and make atonement for him before the LORD. Then the priest is to sacrifice the sin offering and make atonement for the one **to be cleansed** from his uncleanness. After that, the priest shall slaughter the burnt offering and offer it on the altar, together with the grain offering, and make atonement for him, **and he will be clean.**" The wording throughout the chapter presupposes that cleanness is not achieved **until** all the rituals are performed. Hence, priests had to touch lepers before those lepers were pronounced "clean."

¹² For a discussion of the purpose of miracles throughout the Bible, see Dave Miller (2020), *Modern-Day Miracles?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press), <https://store.apologeticspress.org/collections/new-and-featured-products/products/modern-day-miracles>.

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When Are We Saved?

(On the Relationship of Faith and Works in Salvation)

Donnie DeBord, Ph.D.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The following article was written by A.P. auxiliary writer Dr. Donnie DeBord (Th.M. and Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary). Dr. DeBord is an assistant professor of Bible at Freed-Hardeman University.]

WHEN and how are sinners saved? Are sinners saved by faith or by works? Does God save without obedience? Faith and works are often put in contrast to one another when perhaps it would be better to understand belief and works as essential to faith. Abraham believed God's promise in Genesis 12 and acted on faith. In Genesis 15, God reassured Abraham of the covenant. Abraham believed God and his faith was counted as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Abraham's faith was already proven to be an obedient faith. Paul later argued that Abraham was justified by faith without "works of the law" (Romans 4:1-12) to argue the superiority of "faith" over the Mosaic covenant, which was not given for centuries after Abraham. It seems that Paul wanted his readers in Rome to know they could be justified just like Abraham, who was justified by faith—obedient faith—without the law of Moses.¹

Belief and works are two sides of the same coin. Those who are "just" or "righteous" are those who actively "live by faith" (Habakkuk 2:4; Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11). What "matters" is "faith work-

ing through love" (Galatians 5:6). Hebrews 11:6 reminds us that to be a person of faith is to actively "draw near to God" and then to be rewarded for seeking him. Abraham was justified by faith (Romans 4:1-3), but Abraham's faith "was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works." Therefore, "a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:22-24, ESV). To believe is to obey.

Christians are "justified by faith" (Romans 5:1) and "justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24). This is no contradiction. Instead, belief and works are inseparable in the Christian life. Faith can be seen (Matthew 9:2). Christians are described as "faithful"—those who are actively living in the faith. The faithful servant is the one who is actively prepared for his Master's return (Matthew 24:45; 25:23). Barnabas encouraged Christians to be "faithful to the Lord" (Acts 11:23).

Paul demonstrated the necessity of belief and action in Galatians 3:26-27 when he said: "you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Christians are "justified by faith," and that justification by faith begins at baptism. The soon-to-be Christians in Acts 2 were "cut to the heart" and asked what they should do in Acts 2:37. It seems safe to say these individuals believed the truth about Jesus in verse 37. However, they

were still "in sin" rather than "in Christ." So, they were required to "repent and be baptized" to receive the forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Their belief was incomplete without repentance and baptism.

Baptism is not a human work by which salvation is earned. Instead, baptism is a work of God in which salvation is bestowed. Colossians 2:11-14 shows that God is the primary worker in baptism. Christians are "buried with him in baptism," "raised with him through faith," "made alive together with him," and "forgiven." The individual is baptized, but God is the one who works to bring about salvation. The struggle between belief and works is better seen as the union of trust and submission.

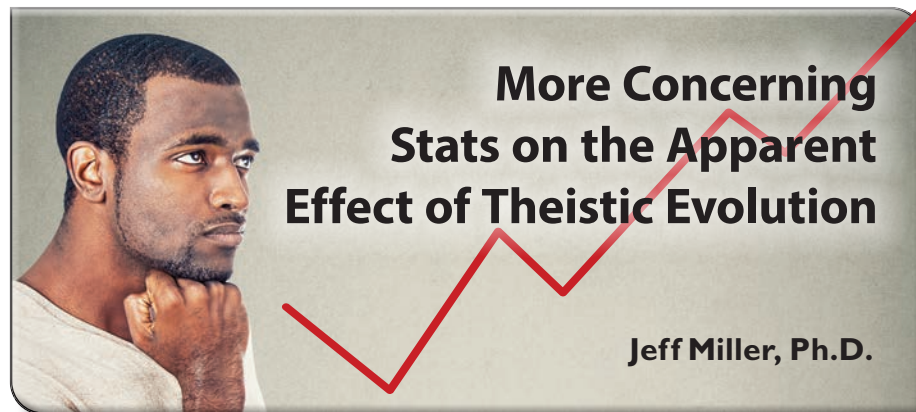
This union of belief and action is also demonstrated by Martin Luther in his "Treatise on Baptism." There Luther said, "there is on earth no greater comfort than baptism, for through it we come under the judgment of grace and mercy, which does not condemn our sins, but drives them out by many trials." Luther went on to say, "There is a fine sentence of St. Augustine, which says, 'Sin is altogether forgiven in baptism; not in such wise that it is no longer present, but in such wise that it is not taken into account.'"² Luther said "a man becomes in baptism guiltless, pure, and sinless.... This faith is of all things the most necessary, for it is the ground of all comfort."³ Following Luther, it seems John Calvin also saw no contradiction between belief and obedience. Calvin said, "[T]hey who regarded baptism as nothing but a token and mark by which we confess our religion before men, as soldiers bear the insignia of their commander as a mark of their profession, have not weighed what was the chief point of baptism. It is to receive baptism with this prom-

ise: 'He who believes and is baptized will be saved' [Mark 16:16]."⁴ The premodern consensus was that God worked when individuals were baptized.

In this discussion, it is helpful to remember that neither faith nor works are meritorious acts by which salvation is earned. God "purchased the church with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). Paul said, "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).⁵ Whoever desires may "take of the water of life without price" (Revelation 22:17). Salvation is received by those who believe (John 3:16) and obey (John 3:36).⁶ But salvation rests upon the promise and work of God. This great truth is summarized in Titus 3:4-7, as Paul taught that God "saved us" but "not because of works done by us in righteousness." Rather, salvation is bestowed when belief is met with obedience in baptism, which is "the washing of regeneration."

ENDNOTES

- ¹ For a brief study of faith and obedience in Romans, see Dave Miller (2021), "The Obedience of Faith in Romans," *Reason & Revelation*, March, 41[3]:34-35, apologeticspress.org/the-obedience-of-faith-in-romans-5955/.
- ² Martin Luther, "A Treatise on the Holy Sacrament of Baptism 1519," *Works of Martin Luther*, 1:62.
- ³ Ibid., 1:63.
- ⁴ John Calvin (1960), *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume 2*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville: Westminster), IV, xv, 2.
- ⁵ For a study on grace, faith, and works in Ephesians, see Eric Lyons (2020), "Ephesians 2:8-9: Contradictory, or Perfectly Consistent?," *Reason & Revelation*, October, 40[10]:110-113, 116-119, apologeticspress.org/ephesians-28-9-contradictory-or-perfectly-consistent-5870/.
- ⁶ For a study of faith and obedience in John 3, see Eric Lyons (2019), "'Believing' in John 3:16," *Reason & Revelation*, September, 39[9]:98-101, 104-107, apologeticspress.org/believing-in-john-316-5723/.



As we reported elsewhere,¹ a 2019 Gallup poll revealed that the number of young Earth creationists in the United States is roughly 40%. More people in America are young Earth creationists than theistic evolutionists (33%), but the number of young Earth creationists is declining. Should Christians be concerned about the teaching of theistic evolution and an old Earth?

For decades, Apologetics Press has documented the dangers of evolutionary thinking being widespread in a society² and in the Church.³ Indeed, it seems clear that belief in theistic evolution can have a tendency to erode one's confidence in a straightforward reading of the biblical text, which could affect one's eternal destiny.⁴ GALLUP polls have revealed that young Earth creationists tend to be more "religious."⁵ "[T]he **most religious** Americans are most likely to be [young Earth—JM] creationists."⁶ Young Earth creationists, for example, are 42% more likely than theistic evolutionists to attend worship services faithfully.⁷ Does belief in theistic evolution actually lead to forsaking the worship assemblies? Are the coupling of the two circumstances a result of a separate underlying factor? It is uncertain. However, since the free gift of salvation is contingent upon obedience to God's instructions (Hebrews 5:9), if it is the case that a person is less likely to obey

God's commands if he accepts theistic evolution, then one's belief with regard to evolution would become an important decision.

A poll by Pew Research Center, titled "Views about Human Evolution,"⁸ further highlighted that young Earth creationists are undeniably more likely to be zealous and faithful to the Word of God. The poll found that among theists in the U.S. (over 85% of whom would self-classify as Christian),⁹ creationists, compared to theistic evolutionists, are much more likely to:

- believe that their Scripture is the Word of God—and, as such, believe that it should be taken literally;
- look to their religion to determine right and wrong [62% of theistic evolutionists look to science, philosophy, and "common sense" over Scripture];
- consider religion to be very important in their lives;
- pray regularly;
- participate in prayer/Scripture study groups;
- regularly read Scripture;
- believe in absolute morality [65% of theistic evolutionists believe the situation determines right and wrong in many cases, rather than Scripture].

Such results are concerning, to say the least. Why does there appear to be a connection between less zeal for religion and theistic evolution?

Is it the case that theistic evolution leads such individuals to become less religious in these ways? Or is it the case that such individuals were already less religious and, subsequently, more easily accepted theistic evolution? Neither option would bode well for theistic evolutionary implications.

Is the connection merely a coincidence that should be disregarded? That suggestion seems unlikely, considering that (1) the trend holds through every one of the categories studied by the pollsters and (2) such a result of theistic evolutionary thinking would be **predicted** to occur. After all, if a person feels he cannot trust what the Bible says about our origin, why would he study it? Why would he trust it when it tells us about right and wrong? Why would he take it seriously when it says to worship, pray, and study Scripture regularly? If he has accepted evolution, which has naturalistic (as opposed to supernaturalistic) implications, is he more or less likely to view God as being at work in the world today—answering prayers, for instance?

When seeing such statistics that speak to the spiritual state of many of those who have accepted theistic evolution, should it be surprising if they are much more likely than are creationists to ultimately leave their faith behind? After all, faith comes from hearing the Word of God (Romans 10:17) and the statistics reveal that theistic evolutionists are less interested in studying God's Word—which will cause their faith to crumble over time. Such statistics highlight the importance of continuing to refute evolution, both biblically and scientifically, and emphasizing the many evidences for biblical Creation.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Cf. Jeff Miller (2020), "Latest Stats on Creationists and Evolutionists in the U.S.," *Reason & Revelation*, 40[7]:80-83.
- ² E.g., Kyle Butt (2008), "Implications of Atheism [Parts 1-2]," Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/implications-of-atheism-part-i-911/>.
- ³ E.g., Eric Lyons (2008), "Why Address the Age of the Earth?" Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/why-address-the-age-of-the-earth-2507/>; Kyle Butt (2010), "A Soul's Salvation Could Hinge On the Earth's Age," Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/a-souls-salvation-could-hinge-on-the-earths-age-3792/>; Dave Miller (2004), "The Implications of Rejecting the Literal Days of Genesis 1," Apologetics Press, <https://apologeticspress.org/the-implications-of-rejecting-the-literal-days-of-genesis-1-1200/>; Jeff Miller (2022), "Should Christians Accept Evolution and an Old Earth to Win Converts?" *Reason & Revelation*, 42[4]:38-44.
- ⁴ Jeff Miller (2012), "Literal Creationists Holding Their Ground in the Polls," *Reason & Revelation*, 32[9]:94.
- ⁵ While being "religious" does not necessarily mean that a person is right with God (Romans 10:2-3), living one's life in complete submission to Christ and His will (i.e., living the Christian faith/religion) is a requirement by God (Romans 1:5; 16:26; Acts 6:7; Matthew 6:33; Matthew 16:24; etc.).
- ⁶ Frank Newport (2012), "In U.S., 46% Hold Creationist View of Human Origins," *GALLUP Politics*, June 1, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/155003/Hold-Creationist-View-Human-Origins.aspx>, emp. added.
- ⁷ Megan Brennan (2019), "40% of Americans Believe in Creationism," *Gallup News On-line*, July 26, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/261680/americans-believe-creationism.aspx>.
- ⁸ "Views about Human Evolution" (2014), *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/views-about-human-evolution/>.
- ⁹ "Religious Landscape Study" (2014), *Pew Research Center*, <http://www.pewforum.org/religious-landscape-study/>.

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NOTE FROM

The Editor

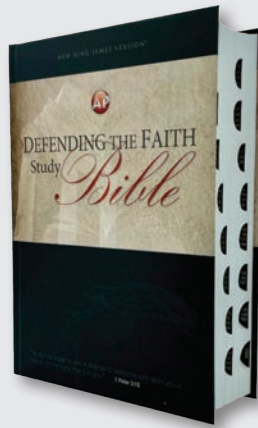


Eternally Beneficial Gifts

What is our reaction to the hundreds or thousands of advertisements we see this time of the year? Are we triggered to impulsively purchase the latest gizmo for our kids? Do we begin pondering about a new pullover for Dad or a coffee mug for Mom? Or do we just become overwhelmed, uncertain, and frustrated by it all—all the ads, choices, expenses, and commercialized hype of the holidays? And hours or days later, do we feel a little “empty” because so much thought, time, and money went toward relatively insignificant things?

Though we may never go wrong with purchasing a good pair of socks or a nice warm sweater (one of my favorites!), Christians should seriously think about gift-giving from an eternal perspective. What can we give to family members, friends, and even our enemies that may change them eternally and lead them closer to God? Do they need a Bible? Could they use an apologetics study Bible, perhaps one with a thumb index?

Do your kids (or someone else's) have questions about animals that *Wonders of God's Creation* could answer? Do they have doubts about



God creating dinosaurs on Day Six of Creation that *Dinosaurs Unleashed* could logically dispel? How about these two foundational books by Kyle Butt: *How Do You Know God Is Real?* and *How Do You Know the Bible Is From God?* What child doesn't need one or more good books like these for Christmas?

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